PUBLIC AFFAIRS GROUP CALFED NEWS JUNE 1999

Editorial: Seize the opportunity; Solve water problems before Babbitt leaves San Diego Union-Tribune - June 29, 1999

A window of opportunity to solve California's most serious water problems may be closing, but many state policy-makers and water officials seem oblivious.

In the past few years, during a time of unprecedented cooperation among cities, farmers and environmentalists, and between the state and federal governments, solutions to problems plaguing California's two main water sources — the Colorado River and San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta — have been drawn up. They now sit waiting for the proper signatures.

But the signatories won't take pen in hand. Legislators, Gov. Gray Davis and water district officials from the Imperial Valley to the Sacramento Valley apparently don't understand that this truce won't last forever.

With only 18 months left in the Clinton administration, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt won't hold his post much longer. Never before has there been an interior secretary who understood and cared about Western water issues as much as Babbitt.

Nor have we had a secretary who understands just how important cooperative efforts are in solving water problems. Babbitt has been involved in every major water decision in California since he took office.

He has been extremely fair to California in decisions about the Colorado River. In fact, some critics from other states, including Babbitt's home state of Arizona, say he has been partial to California. While he has demanded that California formulate a plan to live within its annual allotment of 4.4 million acre-feet, he also has devised a plan for the river's surplus water that would benefit California.

But the biggest users of Colorado River water -- the Los Angeles-based Metropolitan Water District, the Imperial Irrigation District and the Coachella Valley Irrigation District -- persist in squabbling with each other over how much water they should get. They are seemingly oblivious to the fact that unless they agree soon, the good deal on surplus water may evaporate.

Meanwhile, many state and federal lawmakers in California have failed to fully embrace the CalFed Bay-Delta Program — the last, best hope for fixing the crucial waterway that transports Northern California water to the south. The bay-delta had been the flash point of water wars in the past, resulting in multimillion-dollar lawsuits and threats to reduce water shipments southward.

Again, Babbitt has had a strong hand in maintaining support for the bay-delta program. Earlier this year, he helped shepherd divergent water interests within the state to an agreement on a federal funding request. Unfortunately, not all members of the state's congressional delegation signed on to the request. California may get only half of what it asked for.

What many Californians don't realize is that by the end of next year, a very short time in water decision-making, Babbitt will be gone from office. And it's very unlikely, whether under a Democratic or Republic administration, that California will have another interior secretary who understands Western water or is willing to play such an active role as Babbitt has.#

Editorial: CALFED's best hope: Drown all canal plans San Joaquin Record - June 29, 1999

"Either we have hope within us or we don't. Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out. It is hope, above all, which gives us strength to live and continually try new things."

-- Vaclav Havel, president of the Czech Republic, quoted in the introduction of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program's Revised Phase II Report

For the first time, a government document has rejected outright the construction of a canal on the periphery of the San Joaquin Delta. That alone should provide hope for all Californians that water-delivery pressures will not drown Delta-restoration needs.

Talk of a peripheral canal has bobbed to the surface off and on for more than 30 years, but when the collection of 15 state and federal agencies known as CALFED released its four-years-in-the-making report last week, the bypass channel was not among the recommendations. It was sidetracked even for further study until 2007.

Maybe, just maybe, the other CALFED recommendations will get the push they need now that the 44-mile concrete canal is so thoroughly delayed. The money is certainly available -- more than \$5 billion over the next 10 years -- to explore every other project under the sun.

Like Ed Steffani, outgoing general manager of Stockton East Water District, we like the CALFED report's emphasis on restoring groundwater aquifers. Buried in the 45-pound environmental document's pages is this nugget: There is the potential to store up to 500,000 acre-feet of water — enough to supply 1 million families for a year — in underground basins in the San Joaquin Valley.

Said Steffani: "Maybe they'll come running our way with a barrel full of money to do a large-scale groundwater-recharge project."

With this and other state water issues moving forward, it has never been more important for San Joaquin County to speak with one voice. Efforts to find common ground have been trickling along, and the dog days of summer are no time to put progress on hold.

We should do more than just hope to be a part of CALFED's plans; there needs to be pro-active involvement from the county. Let CALFED spend its millions here.

There are hopeful signs in this final report. Among the primary recommendations:

- * Development of more-sophisticated water-delivery systems to save fish and wildlife, rather than significant increases in the flow of fresh water.
- * It's been tried before, but not on this scale: aggressive agriculture and urban water-conservation strategies, including wastewater recycling.
- * Put off for further study the construction of additional above-ground reservoirs.
- * Streamline water-transfer policies -- allowing cities, environmentalists and farmers to buy and trade water more easily.
- * Modify and improve existing canal systems to better accommodate Southern California deliveries.

With a canal -- and all of its controversial aspects -- out of the picture, it is our hope that CALFED, after its 90-day public-hearing period and follow-up adjustments, will pursue these and other plans quickly, efficiently and confidently. Population and land-use pressures abound; it is critical that comprehensive water policy be integrated into the inevitable surge in growth.

The very fact that this coalition has held together and produced this document is further cause for hope. The warring water factions still exist, but there's a growing recognition that CALFED is the major player in solving California's water problems. It is strongly supported both in Washington and in Sacramento. CALFED's political muscle is growing.

But about that canal: One of the best ways to make sure it doesn't resurface is for competing factions -- and conservationists were least enthusiastic about the report -- to work hard on implementation.

Seven and a half years will go by quickly. What is viewed as a victory today could be seen as a stalling tactic if the other plans don't produce measurable differences in restoring the Bay-Delta region.

It's time for every Northern California stakeholder to make sure nobody gets a seven-year itch. It's our best hope.

What's next?

Release of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program's action plan is to be followed by a 90-day period of public comment. Since 1995, the group has been trying to to achieve two often opposing goals -- ecological health for the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, and increased water supplies for the state's farms and cities. The first public hearing on whether those goals have been met will be held Aug. 18 in Stockton. #

Editorial: CalFed uncertainty; Some critical questions remain unanswered Vacaville Reporter (Solano County) - June 29, 1999

What could become the state's most ambitious water plan in decades remains a hazy blueprint to overhaul how water gets to Southern California, how to protect habitat for fish and wildlife, and whether farmers in the delta can survive.

The long-awaited CalFed proposal surfaced last Friday, but was conspicuously absent of two pivotal elements:

Who will pay for it? Will we create new upriver reservoirs?

The rivers that feed the delta in southeast Solano County provide nearly 80 percent of the drinking water for California. The goal of the new CalFed plan is to assure supplies for thirsty cities, for farmers and for the fragile ecosystem that comprises rivers, wetlands and levees.

The public remains relatively unaware of just how critical the CalFed plan is to the future of California. It's most controversial component, a water conduit not unlike the once-defeated Peripheral Canal, is not so much the centerpiece of the newest plan.

Environmentalists are focusing on whether CalFed will lead to new reservoir construction - something water district executives consider long overdue in a state where most of the rain falls in the north and most of the people live in the south.

Solano County officials are very concerned about how much agricultural acreage will be put underwater, and whether there is enough water to ship south to parched Southern California. The report released Friday did not answer their uncertainty.

The CalFed proposal, a balancing act that is far from final, offers a mix of projects that could cost more than \$5 billion over the next decade and beyond. There is some good in it. But there remains some serious guestions, like who will foot the bill and how many reservoirs will be constructed.

As the proposal moves forward, there must be answers. #

Editorial: Water Plan Needs a Boost Los Angeles Times - June 28, 1999

For five years, federal and state agencies have worked—sometimes struggled—with farmers, environmentalists and urban water agencies toward a sweeping plan to restore the environment of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and also assure a steady supply of high-quality water to cities and farms south of the delta. As one participant described the process last Friday, it has been "slow, painful, onerous and debilitating." But the working forum known as Cal-Fed is about to make real decisions that will affect the environment and water use in California for decades.

Unfortunately, the process appears to be losing momentum and the vigorous support of key political leaders just when it needs them most. The closer Cal-Fed comes to making real choices--new water storage reservoirs, for example, or increased conservation or both--the more contentious the debate is likely to become. The next six months will be critical to the future of the process. That is why federal and state leaders, particularly Gov. Gray Davis, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and President Clinton, need to give Cal-Fed a strong vote of confidence right now. The State Water Project, which draws its supplies from the delta, is a major purveyor of water to 16 million Southern Californians via the Metropolitan Water District. A healthy delta is vital to the quality and reliability of Southern California's domestic and industrial water supply. Without Cal-Fed, cities, farms and environmental watchdogs are likely to turn to the courts and regulators to settle their disputes. That is no way to make such important, sweeping policy.

Neither Davis nor Babbitt was on hand Friday when officials released their report on Cal-Fed proposals over the next seven years, costing an estimated \$5 billion. A Babbitt assistant and Mary Nichols, Davis' resources secretary, were present and strongly endorsed the plan.

But the perception among insiders is that commitment from the top is weakening. Friday's event came as state and federal officials grappled with an environmental crisis that forced them to severely cut back pumping from the delta. An unusual concentration of the endangered delta smelt was being sucked into the giant pumps and an unacceptable number of the fish was killed.

Critics of Cal-Fed said the smelt incident showed that five years of state and federal efforts to improve delta operations haven't worked. But Cal-Fed leaders said the problem was exactly the sort that the project outlined Friday is designed to prevent. The Cal-Fed leaders had it right. Without Cal-Fed, California condemns itself to a bitter new round of water battles. But if Cal-Fed is to succeed, Davis and Clinton need to demonstrate their commitment to the only realistic solution to California's constant water problems. #

Cautious plan on Delta water

Sacramento Bee - June 27, Commentary by Dan Walters, Bee columnist

As demand for water climbed toward its summer high this month, some wayward fish forced severe cutbacks in the diversion of water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to farms and homes in the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California.

Wildlife protection agencies ordered diversions to be curtailed to save Delta smelt, which were being sucked into federal and state pumps because they hung around the intakes longer than biologists expected this year, rather than migrating westward.

It was a classic illustration of the Delta's dual, and often contradictory, status as both the chief source of water for the nation's most populous and agriculturally productive state and an important marine estuary.

The conflicts inherent in those roles have driven generations of politicians, water managers and affected interest groups to seek some means of supplying the clean, abundant water that Californians need while protecting the dozens of wildlife species that are dependent on an hospitable environment.

There is one approach that makes the best sense from both environmental and supply standpoints: a canal that would take Sacramento River water around the Delta, thus avoiding the pumps' interference with water flows in the Delta. But this "Peripheral Canal" is fraught with political overtones.

When then-Gov. Jerry Brown finally won legislative approval of a Peripheral Canal plan nearly 20 years ago, completing the State Water Project that his father had begun two decades before that, it touched off a firestorm of opposition from both environmentalists and farmers, who formed a strange-bedfellows alliance to kill it in a statewide election.

Environmentalists feared that with the plumbing in place, Southern California would insist on taking more Northern California water. San Joaquin Valley farmers, meanwhile, thought Brown's plan contained too many restrictions on water diversions.

Since then, three successive governors have struggled with the Delta issue without resolution. And the latest is Democrat Gray Davis, once Brown's chief of staff.

Last week, the Davis administration unveiled its "preferred alternative" for dealing with the Delta, a refinement of the multi-agency "CalFed" study process that had been under way for six years. And it reflects the incrementalism and extreme reluctance to take political risks that are the hallmarks of the Davis administration.

There's no Peripheral Canal. Rather, the proposal would try to fix Delta problems through a series of operational changes, such as greater use of fish screens, coupled with conservation programs aimed at reducing downstream demand, the setting aside of water specifically for environmental situations such as the Delta smelt crisis, and, perhaps, some additional water storage.

The emphasis is on improving wildlife protection, water quality and stability of supplies. But by the proposal's own terms, it offers very little in terms of new water supplies, even as the state continues its rapid population growth, and appears to place supply emphasis on shifting water from farmers to cities. Pointedly, it puts off consideration of a Peripheral Canal for seven years, until Davis' governorship ends.

It's not exactly a punt, but neither is it a bold statement of leadership on California's single most important policy issue: How will the water needs of tens of millions of new people be met without seriously damaging the agricultural economy or the environment?

Davis suggests, in effect, that California try some things during his governorship and if they don't work out, the next governor can worry about it. #

Guarded hope for Delta; Experts laud a huge state and U.S. plan for the waterway's health but call it short on specifics and wonder who will pay the tab

Contra Costa Times - June 26, by Denis Cuff, staff writer

SACRAMENTO --- State and federal agencies Friday unveiled a \$10 billion plan for overhauling Delta water channels, habitat and pumps to give 23 million Californians more stable, healthful water supplies and more wild fish.

Reaction was swift among state water leaders, who said the goals are good but details sadly lacking on how to improve the Delta, the heart of California's water system, and assure adequate water supplies.

Farmers said they want assurances they will get more water. Cities want assurances they will get better water. Environmentalists want guarantees that the state will be able to save its salmon, steelhead, smelt and other fish.

"We're very pleased with the long-term goals for drinking water. We're concerned whether the measures are robust enough to get us there," said Byron Buck, executive director of the California Urban Water Agencies.

"They are coming up with a credible ecosystem plan, but it means nothing without water and money to make it happen. They haven't figured out where it's going to come from," said Barry Nelson, senior fellow at the San Francisco Bay Association.

Managers of the CalFed team of state and federal resources agencies defended their 45-pound report as a broad framework to fix the Delta over 30 years while keeping California's contentious water factions in a truce. They acknowledged their plan doesn't spell out who pays for the \$10 billion, 30-year program. Water bill surcharges, taxes and grants are among the options.

"CalFed is a work in progress," said Patty Beneke, an assistant U.S. secretary of the interior, one of the agencies in the CalFed partnership.

As announced last year, CalFed is postponing its most hotly debated decisions for years.

The agencies will spend at least a year deciding if California needs new reservoirs, and then spend years more to decide where. An expanded Los Vaqueros Reservoir south of Brentwood is one of 12 alternatives to be studied.

CalFed managers also said they will take six to seven years trying to improve Delta fish and water quality before deciding whether to recommend a Peripheral Canal around the eastern edge of the region. Many Northern Californians fear the canal is an ecological threat that will take away too much Delta water.

The Delta, a group of islands and meandering sloughs and rivers between Antioch, Stockton and Sacramento, serves as California's biggest water source, a huge fish nursery and habitat for many birds and other animals.

Conflicts between pumping water and protecting endangered fish have eroded both resources. Fish populations are declining, and water supplies have been restricted to protect endangered fish.

CalFed's new plan, released Friday for a year of public review, attempts to solve the program in stages.

The first phase calls for spending \$5 billion over seven years to boost water conservation and recycling statewide, widen Delta channels to create better fish habitat, and dredge or block off some channels to make water flow more efficiently.

Engineers and biologists also propose installing new screens to protect fish swimming by the giant state and federal water pumps near Tracy that shunt Delta water to people in Livermore, San Jose, Los Angles and San Diego.

Barriers would be installed in the south Delta to improve water quality.

"We want to improve the existing system to have more flexibility to move water without causing damage to fish," said Lester Snow, CalFed's executive director.

The idea: to pump more water when the fish aren't there to be harmed.

CalFed also proposed setting up an environmental water account to buy water for fish in need of extra flows to breed, grow or migrate.

Account managers would buy 100,000 acre-feet of water, store it like money in a bank, and then withdraw or trade the water to help fish.

Beneke said the account could ease conflicts that heated up this month when Delta water pumping to farms and cities was cut to protect an unexpected migration of threatened Delta smelt.

"This (smelt) situation is exactly why we need to have this program move forward," said Beneke of the Interior Department.

Walter Bishop, Contra Costa Water District general manager, said he is pleased the CalFed plan sets guidelines for limiting organic compounds and bromides in Delta water consumed by his 400,000 customers.

"It doesn't provide a complete fix, but a good processing for getting there," Bishop said.

He said also is pleased that CalFed deferred any action on the Peripheral Canal for at least six or seven years.#

\$5B plan to fix Delta; CALFED avoids canal for now San Joaquin Record - June 26, By Jim Nickles, Staff Writer

SACRAMENTO -- After four years of study, a coalition of state and federal agencies proposed a \$5 billion fix-it list for California's water-delivery system, suggesting everything from using depleted groundwater basins as below-ground reservoirs to rebuilding levees, reducing pollution, and making both agricultural and urban water use more efficient.

In its first recommended action plan, the CALFED Bay/Delta Program sidestepped two of the state's most contentious issues -- whether to build more dams to increase storage or build an around-the-Delta channel to ship high-quality Sacramento River water south.

Still, CALFED came under almost immediate fire from the state's perennially warring water factions, including farmers, environmentalists and urban water users.

Delta farmers said the plan would hurt water quality in the southern reaches of the estuary and worsen pollution in the lower San Joaquin River. CALFED officials denied that and said their proposals would do exactly the opposite.

Both the canal and the issue of more surface-water storage deserve further study, CALFED officials said in a presentation in Sacramento attended by top water leaders, farm and industry representatives, and environmentalists.

But at least for the first seven years, CALFED officials said, the state shouldn't build the "isolated channel" formerly known as the Peripheral Canal, which California voters rejected in 1982. Instead, both the Delta and California's water supplies may be improved without a canal, and CALFED's recommended work plan during the next few years will test that, officials said.

And the issue of more dams -- how much good they would do, and who would pay for them -- also remains up in the air, CALFED Executive Director Lester Snow said.

CALFED is a coalition of 15 state and federal agencies brought together by the 1994 Bay/Delta Accord, which attempted to end decades of litigation over the estuary. The hub of California's water-delivery system, a source of water to 20 million Californians, the Delta is also critical habitat for dozens of species of fish, birds and other wildlife.

The 45-pound stack of documents known as the Revised Phase II Report contains a laundry list of recommended actions for the first seven-year stage.

While the planning process has been conceptual up to now, "It is becoming real in terms of actions that must be taken," Snow said.

"We are now at the point where decisions need to be made," said Mike Madigan, chairman of the Bay/Delta Advisory Council, a group that conducted an exhaustive series of meetings the past few years to review CALFED schemes.

But final decisions are still at least a year away.

The draft plan, along with an environmental-impact report, will be the subject of hearings up and down the state this summer. The first will be Aug. 18 in Stockton.

For the first seven-year stage alone, CALFED suggests actions costing nearly \$5.2 billion.

The report recommends spending \$2 billion to improve water-use efficiency and recycling efforts statewide; \$910 million to rebuild wetlands, riverside forests and other habitats in the Delta and throughout the Central Valley, and \$913 million to improve the flow of water through the Delta's existing network of channels.

New state-of-the art fish screens at the state and federal pumps, which have killed an estimated 100,000 Delta smelt in the past month, will cost about \$500 million, one CALFED official said.

"It's a huge investment to make the state and federal pumps more fish friendly," CALFED Assistant Director Stein Buer said.

But few of California's water warriors, who were supposed to make peace through the CALFED process, seemed happy with the new report.

Environmentalists blasted CALFED for keeping dams a long-term option, even though its own studies show dams are not economically feasible.

"CALFED is moving like a glacier to the construction of new dams," said Barry Nelson, a senior fellow at Save the Bay.

Meanwhile, water agencies said the outlined actions don't move fast enough to improve the state's increasingly stressed water supplies.

The Association of California Water Agencies, representing the state's largest water districts, cited the recent slowdown in Delta pumping to reduce the losses of Delta smelt, a threatened species. The slowdown has imperiled water deliveries to farmers in the San Joaquin Valley and to cities in the Santa Clara Valley, home of the state's critical high-tech industries.

"The current crisis in Delta pumping operations underscores the vital necessity of CALFED moving forward more aggressively to resolve the water supply, water quality and environmental conflicts in the Delta," the association said in a written release.

Delta farmers remain deeply unhappy with the CALFED plan, said Alex Hildebrand, a Manteca-area farmer and a leader of the South Delta Water Agency.

Hildebrand said that by reconfiguring the state and federal pumping plants, and not building a long-promised barrier in Grant Line Canal near Tracy, the CALFED plan will worsen water quality in the southern reaches of the Delta and increase the amount of pollution in the lower San Joaquin River.

"It's a real mess," said Hildebrand, a Bay/Delta Advisory Council member.

Snow disagreed.

To prevent migrating fish from being pulled into the pumps, and to maintain water levels in various channels, CALFED is proposing to install three other barriers in Old and Middle rivers. But federal biologists believe a Grant Line barrier would be devastating to Delta smelt, Snow said.

In fact, CALFED is committed to improving water quality in the lower San Joaquin River and the Delta, he said, even if it means buying water to increase flows.

Edward Steffani, general manager of Stockton East Water District, said he was encouraged by CALFED's new emphasis on groundwater storage, something Stockton East has pushed for years to revive eastern San Joaquin County aquifers.

CALFED said up to 500,000 acre-feet of water -- enough to supply 1 million families for a year -- could be stored in groundwater basins in the San Joaquin Valley.

Those supplies could be relied upon, for instance, during droughts or when Delta pumping must be curtailed to protect fish.

"Hopefully they'll come running our way with a barrel full of money to do a large-scale groundwater-recharge project," Steffani said. #

[sidebar]

CALFED highlights

(Associated Press)

Here are main points of the CALFED Bay/Delta Program proposal:

- * WHAT IT IS: The latest step in a years-long effort to improve water quality in the Delta without jeopardizing water supplies for farms and cities.
- * WHAT IT DOES: Among other things, it would widen and deepen channels, increase the capacity of state and federal pumps, restore fish habitats, improve conservation and recycling, and increase groundwater storage.
- * WHAT IT COSTS: Perhaps \$5 billion over the next decade and beyond.
- * WHAT NEXT: The plan will be presented to the public at hearings across the state this summer.
- * STICKING POINT: Whether the state should build reservoirs and new dams to store water, as sought by many water-district executives and opposed by environmentalists.#

Long-sought delta water plan issued

Fresno Bee - June 26, By Mike Lewis and Russell Clemings, staff writers

SACRAMENTO - State officials Friday unveiled a long-awaited Calfed proposal that seeks to parcel out and free up more water in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta system, but critics charged that the plan was long on hope and short on details.

"If Calfed were an airplane, I wouldn't at this moment get on and fly," said Grant Davis, executive director of the Bay Institute. "But we remain hopeful that this process will lead to the long-term restoration of the delta."

The preliminary plan, a decade-long product of a state, federal and activist cooperative called Calfed, is a complex blend of wildlife management, water supply and storage concepts that seek to accomplish an elusive goal: finalize the rules that divide delta water for California's cities, farms and wildlife in wet and dry years.

The several-thousand-page environmental impact report endorsed novel ideas such as a water bank account that would reserve water for fish and other wildlife that depend on the vast delta ecosystem and

the rivers that feed it. It also includes better-known concepts such as more fish screens to allow increased operation of delta pumps and expansion of Shasta and Millerton reservoirs.

But the report stops short of specific recommendations such as how much water is enough for wildlife. Patrick Wright, a deputy secretary in the state Department of Water Resources [sic- Resources Agency], said the lack of concrete specifics was by design.

"What we are saying is that before we make a recommendation, we better evaluate the whole range of water management tools that we have," Wright said Friday, adding that better scientific analysis will help cut through political and policy resistance that could arise in coming months.

The release of the report puts in motion a 90-day public comment period. The state and federal governments are expected to make final decisions on the policies by April 2000. Those decisions will include issues such as which reservoirs would be expanded or built, where ground water might be banked, and how the powerful delta pumps can continue to siphon south millions of gallons of water without killing too many salmon and smelt.

One official who asked to remain anonymous said the Clinton and Davis administrations are aiming for an April release date because officials want potentially unpopular decisions to come after the March primary and well before the November elections.

Westlands Water District board member Dan Errotabere of Riverdale said he was happy about the report's release because it starts the clock toward a final plan and, with that, a regular water supply. He referred several times to the current smelt crisis and the possibility that water deliveries might have been reduced had the crisis not abated.

"With all of these environmental questions, we need to have something that will fix the problems and bring us some certainty," Errotabere said. "We can't go on long-term with this uncertainty. It's just too hard to be a farmer under these conditions.

"I need to be done with this."

Dan Nelson, executive director of the San Luis/Delta Mendota Water Authority, agreed. "We're on the ragged edge in terms of meeting water needs and we must continue to increase pumping in order to blunt the impacts of this crisis," he said.

Wright said the specifics will emerge as the state undertakes the complicated process of balancing surface storage, underground storage and fish protection. The state has budgeted \$10 million this year toward that analysis. It will be a primary focus of the final plan.

The potential for more delays is possible. Last year in the Legislature, a reservoir rift between farmers and environmentalists torpedoed a water bond that would have funded Calfed programs. Within the Calfed talks, the issue of storage remains too hot to handle.

Gov. Davis gave no hint that environmentalists are prepared to retreat from their no-new-reservoirs stance, even if one is included in the final plan. "We are hopeful that we are not going to encounter a situation that the health and welfare of the Bay delta hangs over the issue of building new surface storage and dams."

Farmers, Fish Share in Ballyhooed Water Plan But reactions from both sides tepid at first read San Francisco Chronicle - June 26, by Glen Martin, Staff Writer

A joint state and federal agency released its plan yesterday to save San Francisco Bay while assuring an equitable distribution of water to farms and cities.

The proposal by the cooperative agency, CalFed, would spend as much as \$5 billion during its first phase -- the next seven years -- on a variety of ecosystem restoration and water development projects.

Altogether, the plan is projected to cost as much as \$10 billion over the next 30 years.

Officials said the plan would avert many of the bitter fights between environmentalists and farmers that are perennial in California politics. As an example, they pointed to the recent skirmish over the fate of the endangered delta smelt.

The small, silvery fish, which is listed as a federally endangered species, spawns in the delta of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. This year, populations of the fish have lingered much longer in the delta.

Last week, the smelt's presence forced the huge government pumps in the delta to curtail water deliveries to San Joaquin Valley farms and Santa Clara County. Large numbers of the fish were being sucked into the intake pipes and killed in violation of the Endangered Species Act.

City officials and farmers who are dependent on the water were enraged. Although the fish have since moved away from the pumps and full water deliveries have resumed, the incident underscored the fact that the state's water policy is never far from a major crisis.

Water officials said the plan offered yesterday would help avert such situations.

State Resources Secretary Mary Nichols said CalFed's plan will be able to accommodate both farmers and fish by relying on an "environmental water account" that could be made available to endangered species during critical periods.

"We'll have better mechanisms among the agencies, and we'll be making maximum use of the market," she said. "We'll have a more flexible system."

Mike Madigan, chairman of the Bay-Delta Advisory Committee, said the state will continue to face environmental crises such as the smelt conflict and that the situation will worsen as California's population grows.

"We're going to have to come up with a system that responds to that," he said. "We have to move forward."

Madigan said the process that led to the plan was "painful, slow, onerous and debilitating. (But) the plan has achieved a fair level of agreement. Now is the time to stay the course. Now is the time to bring the plan forward to implementation."

Lester Snow, CalFed's executive director, said the new plan would allow the delta pumps to operate at maximum output while simultaneously protecting fish.

Currently, the pumps must run at reduced levels because of endangered species laws and the less-thanideal configuration of channels around the pumping facilities, Snow said.

By reconstructing the channels and pumping when threatened fish are not present, said Snow, the pumps can be run at their maximum level and the water stored elsewhere for later use. "We can pump opportunistically when there are no conflicts," he said.

Farming and environmental organizations had advance notice of the CalFed plan earlier in the week, and the response from both groups was less than enthusiastic.

Nichols acknowledged as much and hinted that the plan's essential value may lie in the fact that neither side is completely happy with it.

"Even though nobody is getting everything they want, the plan has something for all the affected groups," she said. "We've had our good days and our bad days, but everyone realizes we are in it and have to (remain) in it together."

Among the proposals included in the plan are:

- * Installation of fish screens on pumps in the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers and the delta.
- * Wetland and salmon spawning stream restoration.
- * Treatment and dilution of toxic agricultural wastewater.
- * Using water transfers to benefit both the environment and farms.
- * Storing water in subterranean aquifers.

The agency will take public comment on the plan for the next 90 days. It will issue a "record of decision" next summer, which will serve as the final guideline for state and federal agencies that will carry out the projects.

For more information on the plan, visit the CalFed Web site at http://calfed.ca.gov. #

Water trickles to farms, Silicon Valley a bit faster Officials ease flow restrictions because of Delta smelt San Francisco Examiner - June 26, by Eric Brazil, staff writer

State and federal water and wildlife officials have decided to ease restrictions on pumping water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta that have beleaguered Silicon Valley computer and chip manufacturers and Central Valley farmers.

Last April, an unusually high and persistent concentration of the endangered Delta smelt persuaded U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists to throttle down the huge State Water Project and Central Valley Project pumps.

The result has been insufficient irrigation water for farmers during the hottest time of the harvest season and a drastic drawdown of the reservoir on which Silicon Valley relies.

About 400,000 acre-feet of water has been "lost" to industry and agriculture and allowed to flow, unused, through the Delta during the pumping crisis.

Midsummer pumping by the State Water and Central Valley projects into the aqueducts serving customers south of the Delta is in the neighborhood of 10,000 cubic feet per second. But since last spring, the pumps have been delivering less than 3,000 cfs.

State Water Project contractors are suffering more than those who get their water from the Central Valley Project, because, for reasons unclear to biologists, the smelt have been found in denser concentrations near the state pumps.

"We've basically been pumping at 10 percent of normal," said Steve McCauley, general manager of the State Water Contractors. Friday's joint decision by Fish and Wildlife, the State Department of Water Resources and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation raised the state pumping volume from 700 to 1,800 cubic feet per second at 7 p.m.

The Bureau of Reclamation's Delta pumps have ratcheted up from 2,200 cubic feet per second on Tuesday to 4,600 on Friday.

Nevertheless, "we're still on the edge here, even though we're pumping more," said Dan Nelson, executive director of the San Luis Delta-Mendota Water Authority.

The experts concluded that 90 percent or more of the Delta smelt population had drifted beyond the influence of the pumping plants and that the overall population wouldn't be harmed by increased diversions.

Silicon Valley has been adversely affected by the Delta smelt problem because reduced pumping from the Delta has required the Santa Clara Valley Water District to rely on water from San Luis Reservoir in Merced County, an "off stream" water storage facility, to fill its needs.

The level of San Luis Reservoir had been dropping 2 feet a day during the pumping crisis, Bureau of Reclamation spokesman Jeff McCracken said. It is now storing a million acre-feet of water. "We're going to end up in early September with a low point of about 150,000 acre-feet. The last time we were there was during the drought. . . . The problem for Silicon Valley is that below 300,000 acre-feet it's bad water, and below 200,000 you have trouble pumping it."

Santa Clara Valley Water District will have to shift to pumping groundwater to meet its needs this year, said assistant general manager Walt Wadlow.

Because San Luis stores water pumped from both state and federal projects, the rapid drawdown of the reservoir has unpleasant implications for Central Valley farmers, said Nelson.

"If it dries up before our irrigation needs are met, then we'll have real problems," Nelson said. "This (pump crisis) shows that there's no flexibility in this system. We're overtaxing it and trying to do too much with it."

Key water decisions will impact Valley life Bakersfield Californian - June 26, Commentary by State Sen. Jim Costa

If you care about safe, reliable water for San Joaquin Valley homes and businesses, you will want to keep a close eye on Sacramento, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. That's where a lot of key decisions will soon be made.

Will Southern California make new demands on Valley water? Will we get a water bond on the March 2000 ballot and will the CAL-FED project, established to develop a long-term solution to problems in the bay-delta, survive? Those are some of the questions. The answers will affect everyone who lives, works or plays in our area.

As chairman of the Senate Agriculture and Water Committee, I have long been involved in the fight for adequate supply of water. Several years ago, I helped convince opposing forces to set aside their differences and work with me to write and win voter approval of Proposition 204, the Safe, Clean, Reliable Water Supply Act of 1996.

Now, this historic coalition is working with state and federal officials to implement the measure. The link between our coalition of California environmental, business and agricultural leaders and the federal government is a program called CAL-FED. Keeping it on track is vital. CAL-FED is our best hope to end historic water wars and balance the needs of north and south, of water users and environmental interests.

For example, a current challenge within CAL-FED is to protect funding included in this year's proposed California state budget to help complete a project called the Integrated Storage Investigation. It will give us clear direction on how to best increase water supplies through additional storage.

One of the reasons this is so important is the looming issue of the "Colorado River 4.4 Plan." California currently uses up to 5.2 million acre-feet of water per year from the Colorado River, while our allocation under the law of the river is only 4.2 million acre-feet.

In a nutshell, other states and the federal government are pushing Southern California to reduce its dependence on Colorado River water. If the move is successful, the water agencies that supply Southern California could turn to their other sources - including the water which flows from the Delta to Valley users - to make up the difference.

That's why I am working to assure that Colorado River reform does not mean that Southern California simply turn to us to make up for its lost water allotments. It is also one of the reasons I am placing so much emphasis on developing a new water bond for the March 2000 ballot.

This legislative session, I have introduced Senate Bill 530. The measure would allow voters to decide on a wide array of vital services, including levee improvements, conservation programs and economical ways to store water for dry years.

The bond would also let us take advantage of the efficiencies produced by environmental projects, such as fish screens and barriers at pumping facilities in the Delta that will increase water reliability to local farmers and cities.

Another component of current water efforts is our continuing work to develop a water transfer market in California as a way to provide additional supplies for our region in dry years.

Water districts in the San Joaquin Valley lead the state in developing water transfers that help fill in when state and federal water projects run short. This emerging new market can have genuine benefits for Valley residents without impacting our region's economic viability.

Successfully developing the Colorado River 4.4 Plan, placing a modest bond measure on the March 2000 ballot, developing an appropriate water transfer market and keeping CAL-FED on track would be significant accomplishments for all Californians - especially Valley residents.

It would take the momentum we created with the Proposition 204 coalition and go a long way toward creating water harmony where contention and acrimony have existed for so many years.

Should these projects falter, it is hard to say when, if ever, we will be able to re-create the current coalition and work toward real solutions. As I have stated to the various interests groups on several occasions, progress will be incremental. With water issues there is seldom a ninth-inning homerun.

The importance of our goals cannot be understated. That's why I encourage you to keep an eye on these water issues. They are essential milestones in the fight to protect our quality Valley way of life and continue to improve opportunities for Valley residents.

State Sen. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, represents the 16th Senate District, which includes Kern County. #

Divvying Up Our Water

Ambitious plan, due today, to give fair share to farms, to cities, delta wildlife, bay San Francisco Chronicle - June 25, by Glen Martin, Chronicle Staff Writer

Today the wraps come off a new plan to revive San Francisco Bay, culminating a five-year cooperative venture to save the beleaguered estuary while simultaneously guaranteeing reliable supplies of water to farms and cities.

But there is a hitch: Whether the scheme will work is by no means clear.

The venture began in 1994 with the signing of the Bay Delta Accord. That agreement promised to save San Francisco Bay and the delta of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers through cooperation and compromise rather than litigation and political arm-twisting.

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But today's unveiling is unlikely to put to rest deep-seated concerns. Conservationists say the plan does not demand the one thing necessary to restore endangered fisheries and wildlife: increased flow of water through the delta.

At the same time, farmers worry that they will not get enough water even in years after winters of abundant precipitation, like the current one.

The plan could still run up against an unyielding and discouraging biological reality -- namely, if enough water is provided to save endangered salmon and other species, municipalities and the state's multibillion-dollar agricultural industry might wither with thirst.

Under the Bay-Delta Accord, a joint state-federal agency called CalFed was created to work with environmentalists, cities and farmers to divide the water pouring down the western slope of the Sierra Nevada into the Central Valley and, ultimately, the bay.

More than \$200 million has already been spent on preliminary environmental restoration projects by CalFed. And today, the agency will release its "preferred alternative" plan for water distribution and ecosystem revitalization for the next 30 years.

The chief recommendations are:

- -- Avoiding significant increases in the flow of fresh water through the delta and bay, relying instead on sophisticated water-delivery techniques to save fish and wildlife.
- -- Carrying out aggressive agricultural and urban water conservation strategies, such as wastewater recycling.
- -- Recharging subterranean aquifers as a means of storing water during wet years for use during dry years.
- -- Put off for further study the construction of new above-ground reservoirs.
- -- Streamlining the water transfer process, which will allow cities, farmers and environmental agencies to buy and trade water easily at prices above current government subsidized rates.
- -- Eschewing the construction of a controversial peripheral canal around the delta in favor of modifying existing canals to accommodate water deliveries to the south.

Using these guidelines, CalFed hopes to quell California's seemingly intractable water wars once and for all.

And given the dimensions of the state's water resources, it seems as if there should be enough water for everybody and everything -- farmers, urbanites, salmon and waterfowl.

After all, about 23 million acre-feet of water, on average, flow down the Sacramento and San Joaquin river systems each year. With the right management, economic progress and environmental restoration should be able to proceed apace.

That is the dream, anyway.

Indeed, some of the most cherished goals of the partnership have been met, in large part because of the political muscle wielded by the agency. CalFed is currently financed by the state and federal governments to the tune of \$100 million a year, an indication that support in both Washington and Sacramento is strong.

Considerable progress has been made in remedying some of the environmental affronts of the past.

Impressive bay wetland and salmon spawning stream restoration projects have been carried out by the agency. An ambitious plan to protect migratory fish by screening irrigation pumps in the Sacramento River and the delta is under way.

But what is missing, say many environmentalists, is the most important element of all: fresh water -- more of it for the delta and bay.

Of the roughly 23 million acre-feet of water that flow down the two rivers to the delta each spring, about 11 million acre-feet are diverted for agriculture and cities before they reach the bay. An acre-foot is one acre covered by one foot of water.

Without increased freshwater flows through the Golden Gate, environmentalists say, bay water quality, fisheries and wildlife will all continue to decline.

"Some people are trying to say this process of creating a healthy estuary is totally mysterious, but it isn't," said Bill Kier, a Sausalito fisheries consultant who specializes in the study of salmon and steelhead.

"If you introduce a current of fresh water into an incoming mass of saltwater, they flow around and mix with each other like two kids on a rug," he said.

That area where salt and fresh mix, said Kier, is called the entrapment zone. And generally speaking, the bigger the entrapment zone, the richer the estuary.

"You have all these nutrients from the silt, you have these wonderful brackish conditions, and when you add sunlight, voila -- you get this tremendous explosion of plankton that is the basis for an extraordinarily diverse and abundant food web," Kier said.

As more fresh water is taken out to irrigate fields and quench the thirst of a growing population, the entrapment zone has shrunk dramatically — as have the numbers and species of estuarine fish and shellfish.

But as the CalFed process evolves, the chances for more flows through the bay appear to be slim. Indeed, say CalFed officials, the opposite may be true: More diversions could be earmarked for agriculture and cities.

Still, agency staff members say that is not necessarily a bad thing. They claim that the issue is not so much about the quantity of water as how that water is diverted and used. By employing new techniques, they say, you can divert water and have a healthy environment too.

"if we time our diversions to accommodate fish and wildlife, if we divert more efficiently and carefully, we definitely feel we can divert at current levels with much less impact -- and the potential is there for increased

diversions," said Lester Snow, executive director of the CalFed Bay/Delta Program.

Generally speaking, farming interests are no happier with CalFed than environmentalists are. They agree with Snow that more water diversions are needed -- but they say CalFed's walk doesn't match its talk.

"All I know is, our farmers are on a 70 percent allocation this year, and that is following an extremely wet winter -- there is plenty of water in the system, but we're not getting our share," said David Orth, general manager of the Westlands Water District in the San Joaquin Valley.

Westlands is a sprawling irrigation agency that produces vast quantities of cotton, vegetables and fruit. It consists of 600,000 acres of cropland and holds annual contract entitlements to about 1.15 million acre feet of federally managed water.

"It's incredibly frustrating that we don't have enough federal water in a year of real abundance," Orth said. "If it's like this now, I shudder to think what it'll be like in a drought. We just had to borrow \$33.5 million to

buy water transfer rights from other contract holders to tide our people over. Private water costs twice as much as federal water -- about \$100 an acre-foot compared to \$50."

For many farmers, said Orth, it is hard to see a payoff from CalFed.

"We're already contributing a lot of water to the bay-delta," said Orth. "We're investing heavily in water conservation with technology like microsprinklers and drip irrigation. We're also retiring thousands of acres of land from production. But after all that, our water supplies are far from guaranteed -- in fact, they appear to be steadily shrinking."

Orth said he respects Snow and believes the CalFed director is working in good faith, "but like virtually every other stakeholder, we are frustrated. We see tons of process and very little progress coming out of Cal Fed."

In an attempt to accommodate both farms and the environment, Snow said CalFed managers are evaluating a range of options.

Among them are new water storage facilities. These include rechargeable subterranean aquifers, ``off-stream" reservoirs -- built away from rivers and supplied by canals or pipelines -- and existing reservoirs that are augmented for new uses.

"For instance, in the last category, we might raise a dam higher so it could hold more water, or we could change the operation of a hydroelectric dam so the water in its reservoir is released primarily to help fish rather than produce electricity." Snow said.

Snow said new storage capacity is probably essential if CalFed is to succeed.

"We can save a lot of water through conservation and reclamation -- (at least) 2 million acre-feet a year," he said. "But ultimately, I think we'll also need more storage."

If such steps are taken, Snow believes bay-delta fisheries and wildlife can be guaranteed an annual -- and sizable -- allotment of water, which could be stored during wet years for release into the bay and delta as a

fish-saving expedient during dry years.

But some of CalFed's recommendations trouble many environmentalists and fisheries advocates.

Among them is Zeke Grader, executive director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, a lobbying organization that promotes fishing interests and fisheries habitat protection.

The main point of CalFed, said Grader -- or at least the one that brought environmentalists to the negotiating table -- was assurance of freshwater flows through the bay sufficient to restore fish and wildlife.

"The issue isn't about figuring out ways to get more water from the delta," said Grader. ``This should be about figuring out ways to make do with less delta water. Otherwise, there is no future for the system's fisheries. When I listen to what's coming out of CalFed, I know that denial is still the biggest river in California."

And what about extra storage? Grader thinks more capacity will result in additional environmental degradation without substantively benefiting San Francisco Bay.

"Every time you create a reservoir or raise a dam you are flooding open land or wildlands, and that has a severe impact," he said. "And the rate of evaporation from open reservoirs is horrendous -- it's a terrible waste of water. Also, off-stream reservoirs tend to impound water that is warmer in temperature than onstream reservoirs. And warm water kills salmon eggs and smolts."

Also, said Grader, there is no guarantee that the water that is impounded will be used for fish -- it could go to farms and cities, creating more sprawl and pollution in critical watersheds.

"The reality in this state is that growth is promoted with no consideration to water," he said. "It's true we can't stop growth -- but we're going to have to control and guide it, because sooner or later, we'll run out of water. Period. Right now, developers come in and plunk down strip malls and housing tracts and then just demand water. We can't keep going like that."

Subterranean storage could potentially benefit fish, agrees Grader, but existing law will make it tempting for poachers to steal the water that is squirreled away underground.

"Say one guy does the right thing and pumps a lot of water beneath his property, hoping to sell it later to CalFed," Grader said. "The problem is that aquifers don't begin and stop at property lines. There's nothing to stop somebody else downslope from pumping out the water and using it for his own purposes."

Despite widespread criticism from the green community, not all environmentalists feel that CalFed is undermining its own mandate.

As one of its recommendations, CalFed is proposing an environmental water account. It would provide funding and a guaranteed block of water that could be stored against dry times, then delivered to the areas of the estuary where and when it was needed most.

"We're heartened that CalFed has adopted this concept," said Grant Davis, executive director of The Bay Institute, an environmental and research group concerned with the health of San Francisco Bay.

The account "would be administered by an (agency) created for that specific purpose, one that would have the power to override other interests," said Davis. "This will assure fish and wildlife the water they need year in and year out. It's a very important concept, it's critical to the future of the bay."

That is all well and good, say dissenting environmentalists -- but the volume of the annual "water block" has yet to be defined, and it will be of little real benefit if it is not large enough.

"The crux of the whole problem," said Kier, "is that nobody can figure out how to take 11 million acre-feet of water from the system without hammering the fish. I don't care whether there is a 'block' of water, and they figure out a sophisticated schedule for moving it around. That won't be enough."

Kier noted that a study conducted in the 1980s of several Gulf of Mexico river deltas examined biodiversity and fish abundance. The bottom line, said Kier, is that key species started disappearing when more than 40 percent of a river's water was diverted.

"That's the scenario we're seeing playing out in San Francisco Bay right now," Kier said, "and that's because we're already exceeding the 40 percent diversion level."

And even if an annual allotment of fresh water for fisheries is decreed by CalFed, there is no assurance that it will ever flow through the bay.

California water law favors active diversion and use of water resources over the "passive" maintenance of natural flows. It is therefore possible that farmers and cities could mount a successful challenge to a fish and wildlife water allotment.

"We have to fix California water law if we're going to assure more water for the bay," Grader said. "We have to establish a right to leave water in the river, a right that's just as firm as the right to take it out. And we have to be able to legally ensure that water designated for fish will completely transit the bay and go out the Golden Gate."

Under some CalFed scenarios, said Grader, water provided to help spawning salmon in the upper Sacramento River could be diverted at the delta pumps. "In that case, it wouldn't benefit the lower bay because it wouldn't make it to the entrapment zone," he said.

The biggest problem with CalFed is that the conflicts it is trying to ameliorate may, in the final analysis, prove to be intractable.

Despite the best intentions of the stakeholders, they may be unable to reach a compromise -- their bedrock beliefs could simply be too disparate.

When people who have been fighting for 20 years come to the table, they come with a lot of preconceived notions," said Snow. "They often find it easier to argue over symbols than to find solutions for mutual problems. Given California's rich history of water warfare, I suppose it's to be expected."

Still, said Snow, he is not disheartened. Both sides remain at the negotiating table. The alternative — additional long years of gridlock and litigation — is an eventuality that no one finds acceptable.

"The fact is that no one has walked away from the table yet," he said. "Given all the controversies involved, we've made a lot of progress. And we're going to make more. I have to remain optimistic."

[sidebars]

CALIFORNIA'S WATER FUTURE

A century ago, San Francisco Bay and the delta of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers formed one of the richest estuaries in North America, burgeoning with salmon, shellfish, migratory birds and wild mammals.

But decades of freshwater diversions for agriculture, industry and residential development have drained the bay and delta of much of their fisheries and wildlife. Now, in an attempt to bring back the beleaguered estuary, the state and federal governments are undertaking one of the largest environmental restoration projects in the country.

THE WATERSHED:

Regardless of how CalFed chooses to divide up the state's water, the agency will spend hundreds of millions of dollars on environmental restoration projects.

THE DELTA:

About 23 million acre-feet of water pour down the western slope of the Sierra Nevada each spring. At one time, that all went down the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers and out the Golden Gate, sustaining fish and wildlife.

Today, 30 percent to 60 percent of that fresh water is diverted for farms and cities.

The "entrapment zone" -- the area where salt and fresh water mix in the spring, creating the brackish conditions necessary for abundant estuarine life -- has diminished dramatically.

KEY PLAYERS:

Farms -- Historically, they hold the earliest rights to the state's water. But in recent years, they have had to give up some of their supplies to save declining fish populations.

Cities -- As populations grow, cities must ensure that they have enough water. They have allied themselves with agricultural interests in an attempt to protect water supplies.

Fish and wildlife -- Several species of fish are listed as federally engangered species, and others are considered threatened. Environmentalists represent their interests.

WHO USES WHAT:

About 23 million acre-feet of water flow down the western slope of the Sierra in an average year. Approximately 11 million acre-feet of the total are diverted for agriculture and urban use.

Of that, more than half -- 6 million acre-feet -- are claimed by the big state and federal pumps in the delta, supplying drinking water to 22 million Californians and irrigating approximately 4 million acres of cropland.

There are 7,000 independent water diverters on the Sacramento/San Joaquin system separate from the state and federal projects. They account for the remaining 5 million acre- feet; most of the water is used for agriculture.

- -- 23 million acre-feet flows from the west slope of the Sierra
- -- 12 million acre-feet flow through the system
- -- 6 million acre-feet diverted by pumps
- -- 5 million acre-feet diverted by independents

THE CALFED PLAN

Today, a joint state-federal agency called CalFed will unveil its plan for restoring the San Francisco Bay estuary while guaranteeing supplies for farms and cities.

The proposal culminates a five-year effort to resolve the state's water problems through cooperation and compromise, rather than litigation and political arm-twisting.

Highlights include:

- --Recharging subterranean aquifers to store water during wet years for use during dry years.
- --Studying the feasibility of raising dams and constructing new above-ground reservoirs.
- --Streamlining the process of transferring water between farms and cities.
- --Carrying out aggressive water conservation strategies on farms and in urban areas.
- --Rejecting any plans to construct a controversial peripheral canal around the delta.
- --Treating and diluting agricultural drain water to minimize its effect on fisheries and wildlife.

WHAT'S NEXT:

After a 90-day public comment period on the plan, CalFed will issue a "record of decision" next summer, which will serve as the final guideline for federal and state agencies to implement the project. #

Peripheral Canal idea is declared dead for now Project to send delta water south is sidetracked at least until 2007 San Jose Mercury News - June 25, By Paul Rogers And Frank Sweeney Mercury News Staff Writers

Gov. Gray Davis and the Clinton administration today will do their best to drive a stake through the heart of one of California's most controversial environmental ideas -- building a 44-mile concrete canal around San Francisco Bay's delta to make it easier to ship water to Southern California.

The channel, known as the Peripheral Canal, has been at the center of bitter water fights for more than 20 years. Now it is dead until at least 2007 -- coincidentally, when Davis' second term will end if he is reelected.

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That information is quietly tucked into a huge stack of bureaucratic documents weighing 45 pounds and scheduled to be made public at a Sacramento news conference today. The details are part of an exhaustive environmental impact study by a collection of 15 state and federal agencies known as CalFed. Since 1995, the group has been seeking ways to repair the struggling ecological health of the bay and delta while providing more water for the state's farms and cities.

The delta studies will be completed by next June after public hearings. Final costs to restore the delta fisheries, build new reservoirs, shore up levees and improve drinking water quality could reach \$10 billion over the next 30 years.

"The Peripheral Canal is not part of the preferred alternative," Lester Snow, CalFed's executive director, said Thursday. "There are other ways to address the water quality and fisheries problems."

A report released in December by the same agencies appeared to lean against the canal, but it called for engineering studies on it.

Cost estimates for the canal, which would run around the east edge of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, taking water from the Sacramento River directly to giant pumps at Tracy, generally begin at \$2 billion.

"It has a number of problems," Snow said. "It's a very expensive single action, and it's difficult politically to get support for."

In Golden State politics, there are few ideas more hated by environmentalists, many of whom speak of the canal in the same tones as they do offshore oil rigs and clear-cut redwood forests. Many farmers and urban water agencies, particularly in Southern California but in Silicon Valley as well, favor the canal, saying it could move more and better-quality water through the delta.

Voters say no

After the idea was proposed by former Gov. Jerry Brown in 1982, California voters rejected it with only 38 percent support. That defeat came largely because environmentalists and Northern California leaders accused Los Angeles of a water grab that would wreck the environment of San Francisco Bay. In Santa Clara County, for example, just 11 percent of those voting backed the canal.

Davis, who worked as Brown's chief of staff during the controversy, took no position on the canal during his

1998 run for governor.

But he couldn't escape the issue. The idea resurfaced in earnest in March 1998.

At that time, CalFed -- half of which consisted of agencies from the administration of Republican Gov. Pete Wilson -- released three alternatives for restoring the delta and solving the state's water woes. One was the Peripheral Canal. Wilson supported construction of large reservoirs and other concrete projects like the canal to meet the state's water needs.

But environmentalists and some Northern California Democratic leaders revolted. Arguing that plenty of water could be obtained by conservation, recycling and allowing farmers to sell water to cities more easily, they feared that endangered fish and other animals in the delta would suffer if there was an easy way to ship water south and avoid the delta entirely.

By December, the political writing was on the wall.

Population growth

In his last news conference on the topic, Wilson released a status report on the delta. It included plans for engineering studies of the canal, but no approval or funding. He tersely noted that California's population is projected to nearly double to 59 million by 2040. Those people will need water, he said, and large new projects should not be rejected.

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Today's report goes even further. It has no mention of engineering studies and says only that the canal might be studied after seven years as part of broader options to improve the environment and water quality.

Simply put, it is the first time in the delta restoration process that the canal has been junked in government documents.

"It's a victory," said Jackie McCort, a Sierra Club spokeswoman. "It's a nice win, although seven years can pass by very quickly and it could come back to bite us again."

Others were disappointed.

Amy Fowler, water engineer with the Santa Clara Valley Water District, called the exclusion of the canal "a disappointment" and warned that it could hinder the district's effort to meet stricter federal drinking water standards expected to be issued in 2002.

The district, the wholesale supplier for most retail water agencies in Santa Clara County, has not taken a position on whether it needs the canal. "But we said all along there is a need to study and plan for it, so if we need it we do not lose time," she said.

"We're driven by the Safe Drinking Water Act," Fowler said. "We can't wait seven years, 10 years for CalFed to say it doesn't work. We'd be seven to 10 years behind."

Some supporters of the canal argue that it could provide cleaner drinking water by shipping out water to the state's delivery pumps and aqueducts before it reaches the delta's brackish marshes.

Dave Kranz, a spokesman for the California Farm Bureau Federation, said farmers are pressing for "significant additional storage" underground and in reservoirs. "The question is how deep is their commitment to reservoirs," he said.

". . . We don't want to get too hung up on plumbing per se because we're not in the position to judge the best way. We know we need an improved method to move water."

California's secretary of resources, Mary Nichols, said that by 2007, if it appears a canal is needed, engineering studies could begin.

By then it would be in the lap of a new governor.

"We're not proposing to use a Peripheral Canal as one of our first solutions," Nichols said. "But if we haven't satisfied our objectives, we would consider it seven years from now." #

State pursues plan to restore Sacramento Delta
Peripheral canal isn't a top-tier option in supply network
San Diego Union-Tribune - June 25, By Michael Gardner, Copley News Service

SACRAMENTO -- Quality has replaced quantity as the most pressing matter on California's water agenda.

But planners concede they must leave perhaps the most effective water-quality alternative on the sidelines as they prepare to launch a \$5 billion, seven-year program to restore the Sacramento Delta, the heart of the state's water supply system.

The peripheral canal -- the subject of a contentious debate that has raged for two decades -- is not a first-tier option in environmental studies to be released today, although many water officials say it remains the best way to ensure a clean, reliable supply for Southern California.

Instead, state and federal water officials say they want to pursue a series of smaller projects to modify the existing plumbing system while investing billions in other clean-water programs. Only if those efforts fail would a peripheral canal be given another look.

"If we can succeed and avoid such a controversial facility, that's everybody's preferred outcome," said Lester Snow, a former San Diego County water official who heads CalFed, a joint state-federal agency that has assumed the lead in negotiations over California's water.

Gov. Gray Davis similarly has expressed inclination at this stage to dredge up the canal.

"The attitude about a peripheral canal facility has changed," said Tom Hannigan, director of the state Department of Water Resources.

"It's not looked at as a conveyance facility . . . It's looked at more as a water quality feature. There might be some value to that concept, but I'm certainly not embracing it at this point."

The CalFed environmental study is a precursor to a June 2000 decision on how best to clean up the Sacramento Delta.

"Water policy crawls in California. This is just another small step," said David Guy, who represents northern farm water districts in Sacramento.

Beyond the plan to modify water deliveries, CalFed proposes to study new storage reservoirs in the north, further develop ground water, stress conservation, reinforce levees and implement sweeping fisheries and wildlife protection programs.

Two-thirds of the state's drinking water flows through the Delta, a maze of waterways home to hundreds of rare plant and wildlife species.

A 43-mile canal around the Delta was touted as the answer to Southern California's perennial water woes when it went before voters in 1982.

A coalition of farmers, environmentalists and no-growth advocates waged an effective campaign against the proposal, and California voters rejected it 63 percent to 37 percent. San Diego County voters backed the canal by a 3-to-1 ratio. Northern voters opposed it, 9-to-1.

In the intervening years, conservation efforts, reclamation plants and the soon-to-be-completed Eastside Reservoir in Riverside County have eased shortage fears in the south. Concerns have shifted to quality.

The Delta is the dumping ground for an unhealthy brew of toxic chemicals. State and federal pumps that move water south suck salty water into the Delta where it mixes with industrial pollutants, farm pesticides and even trace metals washed down from abandoned mines.

A canal, backers say, would minimize the toxic stew by separating out water destined for urban use.

For the San Diego region, the immediate issue is Colorado River salt. Cleaner Delta water is now blended with supplies from the river to lower salt levels and make it more affordable to treat.

"If we couldn't get Delta water, we'd have big problems," said Gordon Hess, with the San Diego County Water Authority.

Hess agreed the canal, "from a technical standpoint," offers the best way to ensure clean drinking water.

But the canal remains a long-shot, given its political baggage and estimated \$1.8 billion price tag.

"People are scared to death of the peripheral canal," said Marc Reisner, author of the primer on California's water history, "Cadillac Desert."

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Reisner, now a water consultant for the rice industry, supports the canal, but detractors will never be convinced "no matter what reason and logic argue," he said.

Tom Graff, an attorney for the Environmental Defense Fund, said there is little chance of unearthing the canal given declarations by the Clinton administration that old-style dams and plumbing are a thing of the past.

"The idea they're going to get their own special straw is unlikely," said Graff, referring to southern water interests.

But city water officials say the recommendations to avoid a canal have shaken their faith in CalFed's commitment to water quality.

"There is very little that will provide meaningful drinking water improvement," said Byron Buck, manager of a coalition of urban water agencies. "What's here will hold the line, but it won't provide improvements."

Directors of the Metropolitan Water District, the giant wholesaler that supplies most of San Diego, said the proposal is woefully short of clean-water advances.

Metropolitan directors threatened to reduce their financial contribution to CalFed projects unless changes are made.

"We're only going to pay money for value received," said Tim Quinn, the agency's deputy general manager.

But CalFed chief Snow said the emerging program is not blind to water-quality needs.

Proposals include water transfers to keep clean water flowing south, funding for better treatment facilities and tougher controls on pollution at the source, he said. #

CalFed distills new ideas on water use

Sacramento Bee - June 25, By Nancy Vogel, Bee Staff Writer

Last week San Joaquin Valley farmers were told to prepare to let their crops die. And the Santa Clara Valley, home to the \$40 billion high-tech industry, learned it will most likely have to use emergency water supplies just to get through the summer.

Yet California is awash in water. The big reservoirs that quench the state through summer are full or nearly so.

To avoid what is now unfolding -- a water shortage in a year of abundant rain and snow -- is exactly why the people who fight over water created CalFed five years ago. It is a federal-state super-agency with 30-year, \$10 billion plans for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, which doesn't work well as either California's chief pumping station or a migration corridor for fish, but serves as both. The Delta is the choke-point in the sprawling system of dams and canals that shifts water from north to arid south.

TodayCalFed will issue a 45-pound stack of documents, the latest refinement of its long-range plans.

It contains, CalFed officials say, ideas that could have prevented the current water crisis -- and hopefully will next spring, when small threatened fish called Delta smelt inevitably migrate within range of pumps that send billions of gallons of water south. This month and last the pumps killed so many smelt that federal biologists ordered the pumps slowed. Enough water to supply 2 million people for a year slipped out of the Delta to the Pacific Ocean.

One of most novel ideas imbedded in CalFed's newest report is to treat the environment as if it were a farm or urban water district, and assign to biologists, acting as trustees for fish, the rights to water,

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money, canals and reservoirs. If such an "environmental water account" had been in place this spring, the pumps that serve two-thirds of the state's population still would have been slowed down because of protections under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. But the "account" could be tapped to replace the lost water.

As it is, farmers and cities south of the Delta are now trying to stretch supplies by taking the unusual step of switching to groundwater and dropping local reservoirs that would otherwise be saved in case next year is a dry year.

"There is no doubt in my mind that people will knuckle down and get through this crisis," said Lester Snow, executive director of CalFed. "But the next one's looming out there."

In exercises they call "gaming," federal and state water managers have simulated use of an environmental water account. They say they've found it offers much greater flexibility to all water users. The notion has found support across all interests -- with some caveats.

Jason Peltier, who represents thousands of Central Valley farmers as manager of the Central Valley Project Water Association, said that government biologists must be willing to fail sometimes if they start shifting water supplies for the sake of fish and wildlife, much like farmers do for their crops and cities do for their residents.

"Everybody else involved with water management in California is constantly taking risks, making tradeoffs, determining priorities," he said. "This whole smelt crisis has shown us that the environmental water account, if it's ever going to be real, is going to require a lot more in the way of commitment and risk-taking by regulators. As it is, they say, 'hey, we can get what we want for the fish for free.'"

CalFed estimates the cost of such an account at \$30 million to \$40 million. Snow said that money might come from state bonds, Congress or fees on water users. That is the same mix of funds that have so far allowed CalFed to invest \$228 million in more than 200 environmental restoration projects, such as tearing down five salmon-blocking dams on Battle Creek near Redding and converting Delta farm islands to wetlands.

The CalFed report, a draft environmental impact statement that faces months of public comment and then approval by California Resources Secretary Mary Nichols and U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, puts off for more study the most divisive issues facing CalFed. That includes whether to build a 42-mile canal to divert Sacramento River water around the Delta and more directly to Southern California.

Some southern water districts have long sought such a canal because it would deliver cleaner water untouched by ocean tides and the Delta's peat soil.

Rather than launch a canal, CalFed will attempt over the next seven years to clean up Delta water through hundreds of different actions, such as cutting off the flow of heavy metals from abandoned mines and increasing the flow of fresh water. Only if these diffuse actions fail will a canal be considered later.

As for new dams, CalFed will continue looking at the pros and cons of building new reservoirs on the west side of the Sacramento Valley and expanding Lake Shasta (adding 61/2 feet to the dam near Redding would boost California's water storage enough to irrigate roughly 150 square miles of farmland in a year).

In the works, but not in the new report, are first-ever region-by-region goals for the conservation of water. CalFed figures 1.4 million acre-feet can be conserved each year in California -- more water than Folsom Lake holds.#

Association of California Water Agencies Responds to Release of CALFED's Revised EIR/EIS News release - June 25, 1999

SACRAMENTO -- The Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) recognizes the importance of CALFED's revised Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) for the Bay-Delta estuary. However, with five years having passed since the signing of the Bay-Delta Accord, and the persistence of the very water emergencies CALFED was formed to prevent, the value of this report will remain unproven unless prompt and decisive action is taken to resolve problems facing the Bay-Delta.

CALFED has produced a plan that can work. It is now time for political leaders to take immediate, decisive action necessary to assure that it does work. In our view, without that decisive action, CALFED will not succeed.

Over the past several years, water users have united with environmental interests to provide funding for ecosystem restoration activities in the Bay-Delta system. There is now a significant amount of money committed to such activities -- upwards of \$1 billion by most accounts -- and work has already begun on implementing restoration projects. We need to see a similar level of commitment and guarantees that those projects that provide increased water supplies or improved water quality will also be implemented.

Two-thirds of all Californians rely on the Bay-Delta for drinking water. In spite of that fact, there currently exists a water crisis involving the Delta Smelt and water deliveries which have been restricted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This impasse on the Bay-Delta underscores the vital necessity of CALFED moving forward more aggressively to resolve the water supply adequacy and reliability, water quality and environmental conflicts in the Delta. The fact that San Joaquin Valley growers and Silicon Valley industry are facing drought-like water shortages and water quality impacts during a fifth consecutive wet year is unacceptable. Due to the current pumping restrictions, all California water users who depend on the Delta now also face the risk of reduced water supplies next year, regardless of the weather.

There can be no clearer evidence that California's water infrastructure system is badly obsolete and will not meet the state's needs into the 21st century. We must make immediate investments that will produce short-term improvements, while laying a foundation for overall long-term solutions. It is imperative that:

- * Water supplies for cities and farmers must be increased with a goal of at least 200,000 acre-feet within the first few years of the CALFED program, and by 400,000 acre-feet by the end of Stage 1.
- * CALFED must move forward on the South Delta improvements that will increase both the water supply adequacy and reliability for Delta-dependent water users.
- * CALFED must identify suitable locations for additional off-stream water storage, and pursue their development.
- * CALFED must implement groundwater storage and conjunctive use projects to increase the available water supply in the near-term.
- * CALFED must implement programs to improve the quality of Delta source waters while increasing the available water supply.
- * CALFED must implement programs and policies to provide the proper incentives for local interests to conserve, reclaim and transfer water.

After four years of deliberations and planning behind the comprehensive CALFED Bay-Delta solution, there is no reason for any further delay. The coming year will define whether the CALFED process is a success or failure. Water users remain committed to working toward the success of this critically important program. We know the problems and we understand the solutions. It's time to begin implementing them. #

Editorial: Hopes for water peace drying up Bakersfield Californian - June 24, 1999

Words like "stunned", "unbelievable", "crisis", "sham" and "What's going to happen to the economy of California?" are common in the county's water community following disclosure that a federal agency arbitrarily changed water deliveries to growers in favor of fish in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

One water expert observed, "Nothing that is happening is more important to our county."

The ripple effect will be statewide. The worst aspect is not the immediate loss of water. The crisis is that what was done and how it was done so violate tentative agreements on water management among more than 20 government agencies and water users that a five-year process leading to a hoped-for end to the state's century-long water wars is in jeopardy more than it ever has been in the past.

How the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service took the action to alter the rate at which pumps move water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta into aqueducts violated the Bay-Delta Accord. It is the foundation agreement that started the Cal-Fed process to end the water wars.

Cal-Fed's environmental impact report is due today, with recommendations about how to improve water supply, water quality and water allocation among agricultural, environmental and urban users for the foreseeable future.

Cal-Fed has long been touted as a new process of inter-agency cooperation and communication, taking into account scientific bases for making decisions; acknowledging all beneficial uses of water; cooperating in efforts to improve water quality and quantity; assessing economic impacts of allocations; respecting all users' needs; acknowledging and giving credit for conservation and reclamation. The credo has been, "Let's all get better together."

Critics charge that:

- * The Fish and Wildlife Service acted arbitrarily again and with no consultation with other agencies, state or federal, much less water users.
- * The decision was made at mid- to lower-levels with no approval by Washington, or involvement of top state officials.
- * No account was made for agricultural or municipal needs and impacts.
- * Need for protection of the Delta Smelt was grossly overstated.

In addition to being arbitrary and capricious - some people are muttering about suing the federal government - the action seemed like a blatant political play to environmentalists. Favoritism is precisely what Cal-Fed hoped to avoid by making decision-making more rational.

No long-term impacts of the action were taken into account, another goal of Cal-Fed.

Unanticipated consequences to many non-agricultural water users - Silicon Valley and Southern California, among others - were not taken into account.

The scramble to make local water users whole by raiding the water bank southwest of Bakersfield forced utilization of a plan designed to meet emergency needs in drought years. This has been a fairly wet year and follows on the heels of El Niño. There is no detailed commitment on how and when to pay back the system.

It is not only vocal skeptics of a consultative, multi-disciplinary and pluralistic approach to the political and economic elements of water policies who are alarmed.

Kern County Water Agency Manager Tom Clark has been at the center of years of Cal-Fed negotiations. His voice of moderation has made the case that it is worth great efforts to bring traditional water-use adversaries together for their mutual benefit. But he says now, "We have totally lost confidence in the objectivity of all federal agencies."

Federal involvement is the most crucial element now in Cal-Fed's success for two reasons:

The leadership of Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and Sen. Dianne Feinstein with the respect they command in environmental and urban constituencies, and with the White House and Congress, is vital but has been missing in this instance.

The need to establish the principle that the Endangered Species Act cannot be invoked arbitrarily and as the sole criterion for establishing water allocations.

Cal-Fed has been delayed long past its deadline - it will take years of effort and many laws and regulations to put recommendations into place - while the state grows quickly. If it gets delayed further by a presidential election, it may be difficult to revive.

Worse, some people are saying don't bother. How many times does the federal government have to be told that a return to chronic lawsuits, bruising political campaigns and the power of campaign donations to settle water issues ultimately harms everyone. But more people than ever in Kern County are saying that it is now the very real and growing alternative to a badly abused and undercut Cal-Fed process.#

Water-supply crisis real, legislators told San Joaquin Record - June 23, By Jim Nickles, stafff writer

SACRAMENTO -- Reductions in Delta water exports to protect a threatened fish have created a watersupply crisis that imperils some of California's most critical industries, including computers and agriculture, members of two legislative committees were told Tuesday.

The conflict also threatens to reignite California's water wars just as a fragile coalition of state and federal agencies is about to make its recommendations on how to revive the Delta while bolstering the state's overall water supplies.

After four years of study, the CALFED Bay/Delta Program is set to release its draft plan -- including a recommended course of action -- along with a revised environmental impact report late this week, CALFED Executive Director Lester Snow told a joint session of the Assembly and Senate water committees.

But Assemblyman Michael Machado, D-Linden, chairman of the Assembly's Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee, said CALFED's work could unravel unless those same state and federal agencies can figure out a way to save the Delta smelt without damaging the state's economy.

"Failure to do this -- I can't overemphasize the impact on the CALFED process," he said.

After the hearing, Snow said the recommendations will include a variety of habitat improvements, including better fish screens on the state and federal pumps. At least for the first seven years, CALFED will not recommend an around-the-Delta channel to ease the export of Sacramento River water southward, he said.

Nearly 100,000 smelt, a threatened species protected by both state and federal law, have been killed at the pumps in the past month. To reduce the losses, or "take," the projects have been pumping at less than 3,500 cubic-feet per second, when they need to be at more than 7,000 cfs to maintain adequate deliveries to farms and cities, water officials said.

While an estimated 1,868 smelt were killed Monday, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service allowed the federally owned Tracy Pumping Plant to increase its exports by 500 cfs this week. Officials said most of the smelt seem to be concentrated near the state-operated Banks Pumping Plant, which supplies the California Aqueduct.

The cutback has created a shortfall of about 400,000 acre-feet of water.

But Machado said he's worried that if the projects increase their exports in the coming weeks to make up for that deficit, it will degrade water quality for Delta farmers and even hurt the city of Stockton's wastewater plant.

At times of low flow in the summer and fall, the pumps can actually reverse the lower San Joaquin River, making it harder for the wastewater plant to make discharges that meet water-quality objectives.

Among those most at risk by the looming water shortage are farmers in the San Joaquin Valley, from the Tracy area southward to Kern County, and the Santa Clara Valley's high-tech industries. Silicon Valley receives a large portion of its water supply from San Luis Reservoir near Los Banos, which is being drawn down to make up for the Delta shortfall, said Walt Wadlow, manager of the Santa Clara Valley Water District.

"It looks like we'll lose our entire federal supply in the month of August," he said.

Meanwhile, farmers who have planted crops based on promised state and federal water are now faced with seeing their investments wither on the vine.

"Incredible, mind-boggling and unbelievable," Los Banos farmer Jean-Pierre Sagouspe said. "This thing is totally out of control. ... The state's agricultural economy is the largest in the world. We're almost ready to flush it down the drain."

But environmentalists questioned why the state Department of Water Resources, which operates the State Water Project, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which runs the Central Valley Project, are being allowed to pump at all.

"It is very clear right now that both the state and federal pumps are in violation of the Endangered Species Act," said Barry Nelson of the Save San Francisco Bay Association.

Biologists said it's unclear why the smelt, which must reproduce its entire population each year, have been lingering in harm's way in the southern reaches of the Delta. Normally, each spring's juvenile fish move farther out into the estuary by May and June.

"The smelt have not migrated on our schedule, when we would like them to migrate," Snow said.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service does not believe this year's high losses at the pumps are threatening the survival of the species, said Wayne White, a manager of the service's Sacramento office.

But the high numbers of smelt near the pumps is not an indication that the fish's population is increasing, said Dale Sweetnam, a fisheries biologist with the state Department of Fish and Game's Bay/Delta office in Stockton. #

Friant spill sends seeds downstream Fresno Bee - June 22, By Mark Grossi, staff writer

As government officials struggled to arrange a water release from Friant Dam for a historic restoration project, the San Joaquin River made the flow happen all by itself.

The river filled Millerton Lake so high last weekend that water spilled over the dam and created the desired flow for 38 miles west to Gravelly Ford. In most summers, the river dwindles into a dry riverbed at Gravelly Ford because of the dam.

The extra water floated seeds from upstream trees down to Gravelly Ford, where officials believe the seeds lodged in the riverbank will grow. The spillover at Friant has ended, but the seeds will need more water to survive the summer.

Farmers and environmentalists, in a rare collaboration of courtroom adversaries, are trying to make that happen.

Richard Moss, general manager of the Friant Water Users Authority, representing 15,000 farmers, said the water spilling over the dam was good fortune.

"Sometimes, good luck is what you need," he said. "We need to make the rest of it work now."

Farmers have agreed to slowly release 35,000 acre-feet of irrigation water from Millerton to establish the trees and other vegetation.

The agreement is the first move to restore the river since the dam was completed in 1944.

The unusual farm-environment collaboration is rooted in a lawsuit filed in 1988 by environmentalists who sought to restore the river.

After nearly 11 years of court fights, the two sides have been discussing a settlement for six months.

The flow experiment this month might not have begun at all because governmental agencies could not move fast enough to approve it.

But the river itself took over with a fairly typical June spill, said Friant dam tender Jerry Pretzer.

"The lake was about half a foot over the top of the dam," Pretzer said. "The cooler weather has pushed the runoff peak back to June because the snowpack has been melting a little slower."

Now farmers and environmentalists will have to clear the red tape and a few other problems to release the 35,000 acre-feet of water.

The key to the project: The 35,000 acre-feet of irrigation water must be replaced for farmers.

The replacement water would come from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta where a water-pumping crisis has developed in the past two weeks.

Even though plenty of water is available, endangered fish - the silvery minnow-like delta smelt - are being killed in the pumps. Government wildlife agencies have ordered pumping to be cut back.

The cutbacks could create shortages for some cities and farmers in the San Joaquin Valley.

The experiment on the San Joaquin could be a casualty if water cannot be pumped, Moss said.

"It's a little ironic that an environmental action in the delta may have an impact on an environmental project on the San Joaquin," Moss said. #

Backers of new dam renew push for funds San Joaquin Record - June 22, By Reed Fujii, staff writer

LODI -- Supporters of an effort to build a new dam in Woodbridge that would help protect migratory fish and provide water year-round to Lodi Lake suffered a small setback but are beginning a push for full funding for the project.

A new Woodbridge Dam as well as enhancements -- including a fish ladder, screens and a berm dividing the Mokelumne River from Lodi Lake -- to help protect Chinook salmon and other migratory fish on the river would cost \$13.5 million.

"The next decision on that is in July. So that's where we're needing a lot of public support, to make sure we get that funding," said Dwight Dauber, the Lodi recreation supervisor who oversees Lodi Lake.

While the project has already received \$1.6 million for preliminary design work, a panel of the CALFED Bay/Delta Program last week denied an application for an additional \$500,000 to design fish screens.

Instead, that design work will have to wait for full funding for construction of the project, expected to come in around \$11.9 million.

"The process isn't over, so I hesitate to say we've been shut out," said Andy Christensen, manager of the Woodbridge Irrigation District, which together with Lodi is backing the dam project.

CALFED technical experts ranked the Woodbridge Dam project very high in terms of how well the proposal was put together and how the design would meet its purpose of enhancing migratory fish habitat.

"According to CALFED, there's going to be a lot of competition for the money," Christensen said, adding, "Then, there's the element where the scoring doesn't count, the political end of it."

To that end, Lodi is putting together an effort to garner support from political, business and community leaders, Dauber said. There is something of a push, he added, because it had been thought the funding decision would be made sometime in the fall, not July as now seems the case.

"I think the city of Lodi and the Woodbridge Irrigation District have to make their case," Christensen said. "We'll be asking our state and federal legislators to do what they can to do support this project."

A key part of the proposed project would be a berm that would separate Lodi Lake from the Mokelumne River. Its purpose would be to protect young salmon moving downstream from predation by larger fish in the lake.

However, the berm would also make Lodi Lake a year-round body of water and improve recreation opportunities, since it would be topped by a pedestrian and bicycle path.

"This project is needed, and we need to improve fish passage on the Mokelumne River," Christensen said.

That is particularly important if Chinook salmon are declared an endangered species, a move under consideration.

Bill Jennings, spokesman for the Committee to Save the Mokelumne, said the critical issue is to increase water flow onto the river.

"If there is going to be a dam, then it really needs to be reconstructed with appropriate ladders and screens," Jennings said. #

Protection of fish puts farm, Bay Area water at risk Sacramento Bee - June 18, By Nancy Vogel, Staff Writer

Efforts to protect a small threatened fish have suddenly blown into a crisis that could disrupt water supplies to San Joaquin Valley farms as soon as next week and to the Silicon Valley later this summer, federal and state water officials said Thursday.

For the past month, federal biologists have forced water project operators to pump less than half what they normally would from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, California's primary source of water, to keep threatened Delta smelt from being killed in pumping plants.

The situation hit a critical point Thursday when the biologists refused to ease the pumping restrictions, which have already lasted two weeks longer than usual because smelt are lingering in harm's way near pumping plants.

"What has emerged in the last 48 to 72 hours is really a water supply crisis," said Steve Macaulay, who represents 20 million water users as general manager of the State Water Contractors.

Demand for water is quickly outstripping the relative trickle flowing south from the Delta, water project officials said.

Allowing so much water past pumping plants and out to the Pacific Ocean will hurt the San Joaquin and Southern California supplies not just next week but for months to come, they said.

"This is a serious situation," said Larry Gage, chief of operations for the State Water Project. "It has the potential at this point of impacting both federal and state water project customers and possibly right away."

Brimming Southern California reservoirs mean cities there have sufficient supplies for the near future, experts said. But if Delta pumping doesn't increase within days, San Joaquin Valley farmers could be forced to watch crops wither in a year of abundant rain and snow, and the Santa Clara Valley Water Agency, supplier to Silicon Valley, may face complete loss of its chief water supply.

"They need to start pumping more now, in order for us to not lose our federal water supply in eight weeks," said Walt Wadlow, assistant general manager of the Santa Clara Valley Water District.

As it is, federal and state water project operators are drawing down San Luis Reservoir near Los Banos to make up for water that is no longer being shipped south from the Delta because pumps there in May and June killed tens of thousands more Delta smelt than federal protection plans allow. When San Luis, now at 1.2 million acre-feet, drops to roughly 300,000 acre-feet, algae and sediment make the water unusable to the Santa Clara Valley district.

If necessary, the district will switch to groundwater and local reservoirs to serve 1.7 million customers, including high-tech industry, Wadlow said.

Not all San Joaquin Valley farmers have such options. Roughly 4 million acres of farmland, the backbone of a \$25 billion industry, are irrigated by the State Water Project and federal Central Valley Project, and farmers have already planted crops in expectation of getting 70 percent to 100 percent of their contract supplies.

"Who is it who goes out and says you, farmer, you can stay in business and you, farmer, lose your crop?" said Jason Peltier, who represents CVP customers as manager of the Central Valley Project Water Association. "We find ourselves with a crisis and no flexibility left in the system."

Since 1993, when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the 3-inch Delta smelt, water project operators have typically slowed pumping each May to avoid killing too many of the fragile fish, which are found nowhere else but the Delta.

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But the smelt usually migrate west by the end of May, allowing project operators to accelerate the pumping of water.

This year, perhaps because Delta water is cooler than usual, smelt are lingering within influence of the huge pumping plants in the south Delta.

"Each week we've been through this we thought was the last week, and now it seems like there's not a firm end to the smelt problem," said Chet Bowling, chief of water operations division for the Central Valley Project.

California Department of Fish and Game biologist Dale Sweetnam said that the federal and state pumping plants near Tracy so far in June have killed an estimated 29,585 smelt, while a protection plan backed by the U.S. Endangered Species Act permits the "take" of 10,709 in all of June.

Michael Thabault, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, said there will be no loosening of the pumping restrictions at the moment.

The decision to increase or decrease Delta pumping rests with a team of leaders from more than a dozen federal and state agencies, including the service.

Farm and urban water users on Thursday appealed to those leaders, including U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regional administrator Felicia Marcus and California Resources Agency Secretary Mary Nichols, to increase the flow of water south.

The various agency heads, operating under an umbrella group called CalFed, expect to make a decision about Delta pumping within a week, said CalFed spokeswoman Valerie Holcomb.

To some, the potential water cutbacks are a symptom of how environmental concerns and a swelling population have overtapped California's water system.

"It's just taken more and more flexibility out of the system and we're running into more and more problems," said John Renning, an engineer with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which runs the Central Valley Project.

Peltier blames the "blunt instrument" of the federal Endangered Species Act, saying it gives biologists the power to disrupt billion-dollar economies.

But Gary Bobker, a policy analyst with the environmental group Bay Institute, said water users should simply chalk up the water lost to Delta smelt protection to a 1992 law that dedicated roughly 10 percent of the Central Valley Project's water to fish and wildlife.

Environmentalists and farmers have been arguing about how to account for that water since Congress passed the law.

"When is it time to use some of that water?" said Bobker. "It would seem like now would be a good time." #

State water pumps slowed to save tiny fish - Silicon, Central valleys face supply cutbacks
San Diego Union-Tribune - June 18, By Michael Gardner, Copley News Service

SACRAMENTO -- A tiny fish may be about to cause big problems for Central Valley farmers and Silicon Valley computer makers.

Biologists have discovered that massive pumps that send water south of Sacramento have been grinding up the endangered Delta Smelt at the rate of 60,000 a month, the highest level in at least five years.

To save as many of the minnow-sized fish as possible, the pumps have been slowed dramatically at a time when Central Valley farmers need the water most.

The slowdown also means a major reservoir will be filled so late that the water level could temporarily drop below diversion pipes that supply the Silicon Valley.

The emerging crisis will test the credibility of a landmark 1994 accord between government and water users and likely set the mood for future negotiations to resolve California's stubborn water wars.

Concerns about the huge new losses of Delta Smelt boiled over yesterday during a closed-door meeting of top water advisers who represent Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt and Gov. Gray Davis.

Urban and farm officials demanded an opportunity to air their plight at the meeting, but environmentalists active in ongoing statewide negotiations were shut out.

Reacting angrily, environmentalists warned they will reconsider their participation in the water negotiations.

"It's a real betrayal," said Bill Craven, state director of the Sierra Club.

Water district officials also were crying foul. Water agency chiefs representing the Central Valley claimed state and federal officials promised in 1994 to protect farmers from further shortages. Farmers gave up rights to 1 million acre feet of water in return for assurances that no more would be taken to preserve wildlife, they said.

Davis' new administration likely will be tested to come up with a solution to protect the smelt while keeping farmers and industry happy.

In the middle is Tom Hannigan, the new director of the state Department of Water Resources. Hannigan admittedly had little experience in water issues before he was appointed to the post several weeks ago.

Hannigan insisted there was no hidden agenda at the closed-door meeting. Environmentalists would have been allowed to participate if they had showed up, he said.

"The immediate problem is getting water to farmers who have already planted," said Hannigan, a former assemblyman from Solano County.

It's not clear whether Hannigan can unilaterally order the pumps restored to full power. That authority appears to rest with the Interior Department, which oversees federal endangered species laws.

"We're exploring, legally, where we are," Hannigan said.

His staff has been ordered to develop a report on alternatives by today, Hannigan said.

The response of state and federal government could jeopardize ongoing negotiations to develop long-term policies for water, according to environmentalists, farmers and urban water district representatives.

"They would say this is one of the measuring sticks," Hannigan said.

State and federal officials say they were caught by surprise when schools of the tiny fish kept charging south into the pumps rather than veering west, as expected.

"We've got to figure out why," Hannigan said.

Those at risk of water supply reductions range from computer chip makers to almond farmers.

The Central Valley is the breadbasket of California. Billions of dollars worth of crops are irrigated with supplies delivered by state and federal water projects.

Santa Clara County is the heart of Silicon Valley, where the state's high-tech industry is booming.

The Santa Clara Valley Water District has frantically searched for alternative supplies in case releases from San Luis Reservoir dry up because pumps can't reach the water.

"We'll be sucking air," warned Walter Wadlow, the district's assistant general manager.

One option, Wadlow said, is to tap an emergency reserve set aside in a local reservoir.

Water could become very expensive for the computer industry and other companies in Santa Clara, Wadlow said.#

Area flood study stirs passions Marysville Appeal-Democrat - June 17, by Harold Kruger, staff writer

A Nevada County anti-dam leader was incensed Wednesday at Yuba County after a Calfed panel temporarily shelved a request to fund an environmentally friendly flood control study.

The South Yuba River Citizens League sought \$216,000 from Calfed for its Yuba River Ecological and Flood Control Assessment, what SYRCL dubbed Yuba Tools.

Calfed's Ecosystem Roundtable, an advisory panel, put the request on hold for a few weeks after Yuba County representatives objected.

"This is an irresponsible effort on the behalf of Yuba County and truly shows what their intentions are, which is not to provide a viable flood control solution," said SYRCL Executive Director Shawn Garvey.

"This is an open declaration of war on Camptonville and Nevada County and the upper parts of Yuba County. They should be embarrassed. The voters of Yuba County should remove these supervisors at the next available opportunity." Curt Aikens, the Yuba County Water Agency's assistant administrator, said he is "sorry (that Garvey) feels that way. We're interested in any true partners and moving flood control ahead." Calfed is a consortium of state and federal agencies with a 30-year plan to improve San Francisco Bay, the delta and their tributaries.

Four local officials and a private individual signed a letter to Calfed opposing the SYRCL initiative.

They were Reclamation District 784 Trustee Don Graham, Marysville Mayor Jerry Crippen, Yuba County Board of Supervisors Chairman Bill Simmons, Water Agency Chairman Tib Belza and Dan Logue, chairman of the Yuba-Sutter Flood Control Committee.

"Flood control is a passion with roots deep in our history. Until June 14, 1999, we did not realize that Yuba Tools had a chance of obtaining Calfed funding," they wrote.

"As stakeholders for our communities facing this horrendous flood risk, we cannot support the proposed Yuba Tools and strongly urge Calfed not to fund this request." They contended the SYRCL plan lacked support in the flood-prone areas of Yuba and Sutter counties, duplicated an ongoing flood study by the Water Agency and contained "misleading and erroneous information."

According to Aikens, "Our concern is Calfed needed to have the whole story to make an informed decision on this."

Calfed spokeswoman Valerie Holcomb said the Ecosystem Roundtable meets again July 6.

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"It's definitely not the end," she said, noting that the SYRCL proposal received high scores from a technical panel.

"Those proposals over which there is controversy, they decided to consider again in a meeting in July," she said.

SYRCL said its proposal is supported by about 50 local, state and federal agencies and organizations.

Garvey vowed that SYRCL will proceed with the study if Calfed money is unavailable.

"The project has been funded by a large major foundation here in California," he said. "We will do this project anyway." Yuba County officials have "just marginalized themselves even further. This is explosive," Garvey said.

Water Agency directors have scheduled a June 24 meeting to receive an update on their ongoing supplemental flood control program study.

Camptonville opponents of a reservoir at Freemans Crossing and Nevada County environmentalists are expected to show up in force.

Earlier this week, SYRCL issued a press release based on documents it obtained from the Water Agency.

SYRCL said the agency will continue to study dams at Edwards Crossing, Freemans Crossing, Parks Bar, The Narrows and Waldo near the Spenceville Recreation and Wildlife Refuge.

SYRCL's John Regan said agency officials "promised residents a narrowed list of options, but (the agency) just seems narrowed-minded in (its) pursuit of a big dam." #

Editorial: Just add water San Francisco Examiner - June 12, 1999

In a good year for rivers and reservoirs, California legislators begin to debate details of a proposed \$1.8 billion bond issue.

June represents what is in actuality the high-water mark of the Sierra, where the great snowfields of winter melt into icewater under the sunshine of spring. John Muir once described how mountain rivers, fed by a thousand waterfalls, "sing songs from one end of the range to the other."

Accustomed as we are to opening a tap without giving it much thought, we in San Francisco and most of the Peninsula cities rarely ponder the mountain water's 170-mile journey through the Hetch Hetchy system.

Much of our tap water begins as flakes of snow in the mid-Sierra, including the peaks that gave their names to the Lyell and Dana forks. These streams merge at scenic Tuolumne Meadows in Yosemite National Park. Then, as the Tuolumne River, the water sings down the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne into the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir.

About half the river's spring flow is eventually diverted into the granite tunnels, penstocks, pipelines and siphons of the 167-mile aqueduct to Crystal Springs Reservoir. Pumps ship it to neighborhood reservoirs and, finally, to the water mains that supply our homes and businesses.

It's much the same throughout California, a state with 1,400 large dams. Rain and snowmelt from the Trinity Alps and the Sierra Nevada range are captured, stored, then diverted south in the dry months of summer for the benefit of cities, industries, homes and farm owners. About 80 percent is pumped via canals, mostly at public expense to the great cotton plantations, orchards, pastures, ranches, vineyards and hugely productive farms of the nation's leading agricultural state.

So much runoff poured so heavily into California reservoirs this year that the state Department of Water Resources announced, "Statewide storage is well above average, making Water Year 1999 the fifth good water supply year in a row."

For reasons that only a social psychologist might attempt to explain, people (and politicians) tend to forget up-and-down weather weirdness over the years. For example, in the record wetness of 1982-83, snow at Soda Springs was still as deep as 180 inches on May Day. And on the same date in the record dryness of 1976-77, the last granule of snow had melted by mid-April.

Decisions about water systems aren't reached in the snowfields or the rivers of springtime. Our state legislators are already said to be working hard in the Capitol on proposals to ask voters next year to approve a \$1.8 billion bond issue. It would upgrade and improve the State Water Project's 30-year-old system of 32 storage reservoirs (including Lake Oroville), 660 miles of concrete canals (including the California Aqueduct), 20 pumping plants and five hydroelectric plants. Its pipelines serve the homes of 20 million people, irrigate 660,000 acres of once-arid farmland and are responsible for coining big profits to speculators in sagebrush properties in Kern County and Southern California.

The devilish details are being worked out by environmentalists who want to keep a peripheral canal by any other name from turning the Delta into the Salton Sea, by lobbyists who want to make sure that farmland owners continue to get publicly subsidized irrigation and by managers who want more water for new subdivisions (including the Metropolitan Water District's consortium of 27 cities and water agencies in six Southern California counties).

Environmental concerns, if built into the bond issue proposal, could also affect San Francisco's appropriation of the spring flood from the Tuolumne River. Without the Hetch Hetchy Aqueduct, it would flow into the San Joaquin River and thence to the endangered sloughs of the Delta.

Water issues in California are so complex, involving the competing claims of so many different stakeholders, that public discussion is almost non-existent. That's too bad, because nobody disputes the fact that water is the key to prosperity in a state where distant cities and valley farms rely on shipments of mountain snowmelt. We'll keep an eye on the lobbyists, the wonks and the politicians as they play water polo with California's future.#